Chronicles of Food Protection

www.vdacs.virginia.gov/fdsafety May 2005

Greetings Food Industry! In this issue, learn more about sushi safety, new trans fat labeling rules, inspecting incoming materials, and other pertinent food safety and security topics.

Food Security

Inspecting Incoming Food Materials

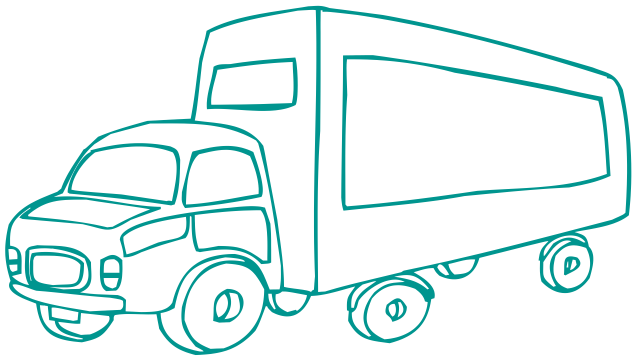
As part of an on-going food security plan in your establishment, always thoroughly inspect incoming food materials. Not only should this be part of your food security plan, it should also be a part of your food safety or quality assurance program. Also, dealing with good, quality products makes for good business relations. Keep in mind that products that are received spoiled or contaminated will never change into good products.

At a minimum, you will need a flashlight and pen and paper to conduct an inspection of your incoming food materials. You may also choose to bring along a black light and sampling supplies.

First, note the outside condition of the delivery vehicle, as the outside condition may indicate whether or not its contents were exposed to contamination while in transit. The shipment is more likely to be contaminated if the vehicle is an open-bed truck that is not properly covered or a truck or boxcar that is visibly damaged (ex: holes).

Next, check to see if the doors of the vehicle compartment have a seal and if it is broken or intact. A broken seal may be an indication that the integrity of the merchandise has been compromised.

Once you've opened the compartment, look to see if packages are damaged or broken. Damage may indicate rodent or insect contamination or the packages could have been improperly stacked which may have led to broken containers.



Look for evidence of insect, rodent or bird activity, such as droppings or feathers. This may mean that the products have been infested or contaminated. In either case, it is a violation of the Virginia Food Laws and could result in compliance follow-up or product seizure by VDACS inspectors. Additionally, accepting rodent or insect infested foods could lead to a much larger problem in your establishment.

You may choose to take random samples from the shipment and examine them for contamination either on the spot or in a laboratory.

If everything appears to be in line so far, begin unloading the shipment and note if any non-food items are also in the shipment. If so, be aware of leakers or broken containers of poisonous substances that may have caused contamination of your food products.

After unloading the shipment, don't forget to observe the inside condition of the vehicle compartment. Floors and walls in disrepair and residue wastes from non-food shipments can cause contamination.

Finally, decide if you will accept or reject the overall shipment. You may find it helpful to have an incoming food material inspection report to assist you or your staff in conducting these inspections. A sample inspection report can be found at **http://vm.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/inp-9.html**. Feel free to use this sample as is or modify it to meet your needs. Remember, inspecting incoming products is a key element in any food security plan, not to mention, food safety and quality assurance programs.[3]

Bioterrorism Act Reminder

All businesses covered by the Establishment and Maintenance of Records rule must comply by December 9, 2005, except small and very small businesses. Visit FDA's Web site at www.fda.gov/oc/bioterrorism/bioact.html for more information on this rule or other rules associated with the BT Act.

Food Safety

Sushi Safety

If you own or operate a sushi operation within your food establishment, take some time to educate your employees on the proper way to prepare and handle sushi.

First, all products should come from an approved and identifiable source. Additionally, all seafood, including fish, shellfish, crustaceans, eggs (roe), and surimi should come from a source that operates under a HACCP plan.

Certain fish, such as small tuna, require freezing either by suppliers or by the retail operations themselves prior to use in a ready-to-eat food item due to a potential parasite hazard. Freezing to kill parasites requires fish to be frozen at -4°F or below for 7 days; at -31°F or below for 15 hours; or at - 31°F or below until solid and then stored at -4°F or below for 24 hours.

If you are using a type of fish that has an identified parasite hazard and are receiving the fish from a supplier who has agreed to freeze the fish for you, you should request a written agreement or statement from the supplier indicating that the fish supplied have been frozen to a temperature and for a time as specified in the above paragraph. If you choose to freeze the fish yourself, be sure that the freezing temperature and time to which the fish were subjected to that temperature are recorded. It is important that these records are maintained for 90 calendar days beyond the time of service or sale of the fish.

Secondly, if you are using bamboo or plastic mats in rolling your sushi, you should line them with plastic film and rewrap them within 4 hours of continuous use and in between contact with different sushi products. The mats will need to be cleaned and sanitized daily.

Thirdly, it is important to take special care when preparing sushi rice to prevent potential bacterial growth. Heat during the cooking of rice can activate certain bacterial spores that can grow and release toxins unless the rice is preserved or refrigerated. Because refrigerated rice is often more difficult to form for sushi and hot rice is too hot to handle, most sushi operations choose to acidify the rice to protect it during handling without refrigeration.

If you choose to acidify your rice, ensure that employees are carefully monitoring the pH of each batch. It is best to acidify rice when it is warm to assure

better mixing and penetration of the acid solution. The production time and final pH should be recorded for each batch of sushi rice. Acidified rice should have an initial, targeted pH of 4.1 and be thoroughly mixed to assure the rice does not exceed an equilibrium pH of 4.6. Properly acidified rice is not considered to be a potentially hazardous food.

For those of you who may be new to sushi operations, it is important to note that acidification of rice refers to white rice, not brown rice. Brown rice is typically not acidified since the harder surface coating in the brown rice is difficult to penetrate with typical acid solutions. In the non-acidified condition, cooked brown rice is still considered to be a potentially hazardous food.

Finally, your finished products and fish used in the preparation of sushi or related products should be stored at 45°F or less. If the temperature is exceeded for longer than 4 hours, the product should be discarded. Be sure that your finished products are properly labeled with the name of the product, ingredients (be sure to include the name(s) of specific seafood present), net weight, and the name and address of the manufacturer before offering the products for retail sale. Additionally, it is important to label your product with a "Keep Refrigerated" statement to ensure proper handling by the consumer.[1]

Summer Food Safety Alert

Warmer weather is here! Keep birds and insects at bay by keeping doors closed and properly screening open windows.

Trans Fat Labeling

Effective January 1, 2006 food manufacturers will need to begin listing the amount of "trans fat" in a serving on a separate line under saturated fat in the Nutrition Facts or Supplement Facts panels of their products. No percent daily value (%DV) has been established for trans fat, so that does not need to be listed on the label.

FDA defines trans fat as all unsaturated fatty acids that contain one or more isolated (i.e. nonconjugated) double bonds in a trans configuration. See the "Questions and Answers to Trans Fat Nutritional Labeling" at the Web site listed below for a more detailed explanation and diagram.

If your product has less than 0.5 g of total fat per serving and makes no claims about fat, fatty acids, or cholesterol, you do not need to list the amount of trans fat on your Nutrition Facts Panel. However, you will need a footnote stating "Not a significant source of trans fat."

FDA has not established any nutrient content claims for trans fat at this time; therefore, no claims can be made legally. A nutrient content claim is a statement made on the food package label that indicates the product contains a low to high amount of a specific nutrient (i.e. high fiber, low fat, etc.).

If you would like more information on trans fat labeling, please visit FDA's Web site at **www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/lab-cat.html**.[2]

Farmers' Markets

It's that time of year again. If you are an operator of a Virginia farmers' market, help protect your customers by ensuring that all of your vendors have received the necessary inspections.

Many times, individuals wish to prepare food items in their homes to sell at local farmers' markets. Such items may include salsa from their home grown tomatoes, jams, jellies, and pies from their home grown fruits, etc. The VDACS Food Safety and Security Program does not object to this. However, it is important to make sure that these products are properly labeled and are being processed in a safe manner that is in compliance with the Virginia Food Laws and related regulations.

If you receive an application from someone wishing to sell manufactured food products at your farmers' market, please verify that they are under inspection by our agency. If they are not under inspection, please ask them to call 804-786-3520 and someone will be glad to assist them with taking the necessary steps to have their manufacturing facility (ex: home kitchen) inspected.

If you wish to have packets of information on hand to supply to your interested applicants, contact the number above.

References:

1. AFDO's Guidance for Processing Sushi in Retail Operations. **www.afdo.org**

2 FDA's trans fat Web site: **www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/lab-cat.html**

3. FDA's CFSAN Inspecting Incoming Food Materials **http://vm.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/insp-1.html**

CHRONICLES OF FOOD PROTECTION
is published by the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services' Division of Animal and Food Industry Services, Food Safety and Security Program
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